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Necessity of an American Merchant Marine

EXTENSION OF REMARKS

OF

HON. HERBERT R. O'CONOR

OF MARYLAND

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Monday, April 9 (legislative day of
Monday, March 26), 1951

Mr. O'CONOR. Mr. President, the question has been raised more than once, in connection with proposed legislation to aid the United States merchant marine, Why a merchant marine?

An article in the Mooremack News for March 1951, entitled "Korean Epic," and an editorial entitled "Why a Merchant Marine?" give very persuasive answers to the question as to the need of maintaining and supporting a merchant marine whose first loyalty and efforts will be devoted to the interests of the United States in war as well as in peace.

I ask unanimous consent that the article and editorial be printed in the Appendix of the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

There being no objection, the article and editorial were ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Mooremack News of March 1951]

KOREAN EPIC

In the past few weeks stories have drifted back from Korea, through letters and news dispatches, feature pieces in the newspapers, and official Washington statements, telling of the tremendous role played by American merchant ships in the difficult tasks faced by the United Nations forces in the Pacific war.

Moore-McCormack Lines has been honored by the participation of several of its ships in the operation, including the most fantastic incident of all, involving the vessel *Meredith Victory* which, late in December, evacuated more than 14,000 persons from Hungnam, Korea, to Pusan, a nightmarish voyage that lasted three terrible days.

Both the *Mormacmoon* and the *Hunter Victory* which, along with the *Meredith Victory*, have been under charter by Mooremack to the Military Sea Transportation Service, also

have written chapters in this newest record of achievement and have been accorded formal acknowledgment by the Government.

The *Meredith Victory* story, however, tops everything else in sheer drama. Indeed, when the first reports came in, officials of Military Sea Transportation Service and Mooremack expressed disbelief that this ship, built to carry 12 passengers, commanded by Capt. L. P. LaRue, of Philadelphia, had actually carried 14,000. But quick checks supported the first report, and letters from men who were aboard.

Hardly were the fear-driven passengers aboard the ship after a desperate flight across the country, according to Dino S. Savastio, the ship's mate, than calls came to help with the delivery of mothers, five of whom gave birth within the first 24 hours. "There I stood with babies all around and something doing every minute," he wrote his parents in Franklin Square, Long Island, as reported by the Nassau County paper *Newsday*.

The Philadelphia Bulletin, reporting the *Meredith Victory* story with special relish since her master, Capt. L. P. LaRue, is a native of that city, said that the crew had loaded the 14,000 Koreans by using booms and makeshift elevators and when the ship was loaded, she shoved off. One picture, reproduced on this page, shows a makeshift elevator in operation.

Formal naval commendation for their work came to all of the Mooremack ships and to those of other operators as well. Vice Admiral C. T. Joy, USN, of the Far East command, sent this message to Captain LaRue:

"My most sincere congratulations on a job well done. Your performance throughout the Korean campaign has always been notable. In the successful redeployment of ground forces from northeast Korea your initiative and your enthusiastic and prompt response to all demands indicate that your organization is at its best when the chips are down. The merchant mariners who performed for you did so silently but their accomplishment speaks loudly. I find it comforting to work with such teammates."

Capt. A. F. Junker, USN, Deputy Commander of the MSTs, Western Pacific, transmitting Admiral Joy's message, added this on his own: "The cooperation and assistance of the merchant marine in the above-mentioned operation adds but one more page of glory to merchant-marine his-

tory, and I desire to add my own congratulations to those of Admiral Joy."

Charles Regal, editor of the column, *Down the Hatch*, for the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* wrote:

"Man of the year in this, man of the year in that. How about the ship of the year? As far as Down the Hatch is concerned 1950's outstanding merchant ship was the steamship *Meredith Victory*, the ship that on December 22 evacuated 14,000 South Korean refugees in one load."

Mr. Regal quoted Capt. Raymond Fosse of the transport *Sergeant Truman Kimbro*, a follows, describing his thought when he saw the *Meredith Victory* approach Pusan:

"When we first saw that Victory ship we couldn't figure out what in the world it had on deck. From a distance it was simply a dark, solid mass. As the ship came nearer we could see it was human beings. They were packed so close you wondered how they could breathe. And there wasn't a sound from them. They just stood there, silently waiting. Even the babies and children were strangely quiet. Unless you saw it, you couldn't believe it."

Mr. Regal said of the *Meredith Victory's* 14,000: "That surely was the largest number of persons ever taken aboard a freighter, of any size, and it may be the largest load ever taken by any ship. The *Queen Mary* (81,238 gross tons) reportedly averaged ten to twelve thousands troops during the war. (The *Meredith Victory* is listed at 7,607 tons). Inquiry at the New York offices of the Cunard White Star Line revealed that the largest passenger load ever carried by either of the Queen ships during the war was 15,000. The *Queen Elizabeth* in peacetime can carry 2,200 passengers, the *Queen Mary*, 2,000, as against the *Meredith Victory's* 14,000. The feat of the latter at Korea becomes the more striking on the basis of comparison.

The *Mormacmoon*, too, found drama when she was assigned to the Hungnam operation to pick up 2,800 evacuees. The Koreans carrying rations of fish and rice, were sent to the ship's hold where many of them climbed into trucks and, despite orders from the ship's officers, proceeded to run truck motors to offset the cold. Fifty Koreans were overcome by the fumes, and their lives were saved only because the ship's officers carried them to the deck and worked on them. This detail of the story, also carried by *Newsday*, was reported in a letter by

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mes G. Wilkerson, her second mate, of Herose, Long Island, to his parents.

The effort of the *Hunter Victory* in this operation may be gaged by the following letter to the president of Moore-McCormack Lines, sent from Pusan by the Reverend Father P. H. Cleary, a chaplain, a member of the Maryknoll order of priests:

"Permit me to convey to you an expression of congratulations and sincere thanks for the splendid conduct of the officers and crew of your ship *Hunter Victory* in its recent evacuation operation of our forces from Hungnam to Pusan.

"The group with which I came out, Tenth Corps, loaded Saturday night, December 16, at Hungnam early Sunday morning, the 17th, arrived Pusan Tuesday the 19th.

"As we neared Pusan, I have never heard of any ship's personnel from all sides such as exclamations of praise as came spontaneously from the officers of the Tenth Corps for the officers and crew of the *Hunter Victory*. The way they had gone all out to take care of us and make us as comfortable as possible at the cost of innumerable privations and equal hardships to themselves was the general topic of conversation among the groups of Army men wherever they gathered about the ship. The gratitude of all was sincere and deep. Personally, the officer whom I wish to commend most highly is the chief steward, Mr. John J. McGee. He went all out, performed a difficult job with unfailing courtesy and good humor successfully and to the delight of all aboard.

"I know that several of the Tenth Corps officers intended to write you to express their thanks and appreciation. The press of present circumstances of war and the crowded conditions here at the port may prevent their doing so. As the Catholic chaplain aboard, I wish to perform the very pleasant duty of addressing you in their behalf. Only under the conditions I have just referred to have prevented me from doing so more promptly. With every assurance of grateful respect to you and your worthy representatives on the *Hunter Victory*."

A. V. Moore, president of the company, replying to Father Cleary, expressed his appreciation and that of the company, advised Father Cleary that he was sending a copy of the letter to Captain Preusch and Chief Steward McGee, and added:

"I know all the officers and crew of the *Hunter Victory* will indeed be most pleased to see that their efforts to serve under extremely difficult conditions were so well rewarded. Yes, indeed, all of us admire the courage of all those engaged in this present crisis in Korea. May the prayers of those at home help to speed a just peace and end this worldly unrest."

Capt. Philip W. Atkinson, of the *Mormacoon*, is a veteran Mooremack skipper. A native of Fitchburg, Mass., he worked up to chief officer through several of the company's ships, including the *Saquache*, the *Carplaka*,

Argosy, *Scanmail*, *Scanpenn*, *Scanstates*, *Scanyork*, and others, and got his first command in 1936, the *Cliffwood*.

Captain LaRue won promotions through chief officer and became master of the *Smith Thompson* in 1944, then the *George B. McClellan*, and the *Whittier Victory*. He served 6 months as first officer of the *Uruguay*, commanded the *Deborah Gannett* and the *Mormacwren* before taking command of the *Meredith Victory* in July of 1950.

Capt. Charles H. Preusch, of the *Hunter Victory*, was born in Elmhurst, went to sea after his high-school work, as an assistant purser, then studied at City College, worked as a clerk and mechanic until he entered the Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point in 1942. He was graduated in 1944, worked up from cadet through chief mate on several ships and obtained his first command, the *Hunter Victory*, in August of 1950.

[From the Mooremack News of March 1951]

WHY A MERCHANT MARINE?

Every so often the question is raised—Why a merchant marine? The fact that it has been answered a thousand times seems not to matter; again and again the facts must be presented in reply to the arguments that you can build a ship at lower cost in a foreign yard, and man her much more cheaply with non-Americans. So why not build our ships in foreign yards? And why not man them with foreigners and operate them under another flag? Why not, indeed?

Of course, anyone who knows the story of the merchant fleet in the recent war does not ask these questions. The men who served in the war and saw our ships in action as transports of men and matériel, especially those high officers of Army and Navy who have openly and gladly conceded that their branches of our Armed Forces could never have achieved their wartime records without the help of merchant ships, are not likely to ask, either. But unfortunately such folk appear to be in the minority.

Something of a new type of answer may be found on pages 4 and 5 of this issue of the Mooremack News, in the stories of the *Mormacmoon*, the *Meredith Victory*, and the *Hunter Victory*. When reading that story, remember that the United States is not now at war, that we as a Nation are merely participating in Korea as a unit of the United Nations.

But these American merchant ships have served, nevertheless, as part of our Nation's contribution to the great cause that involves the democratic peoples of the world. Because we have merchant ships we were able to send them to help with such tasks as that article describes.

Imagine a ship built to accommodate 12 passengers, and in an emergency moving 14,000 panic-stricken souls from the scene of their peril, the young officers burdened with problems beyond anything they had ever imagined in their days of training. That is the *Meredith Victory's* story. Yet she was

only one of more than 300 ships, merchant ships, at work on the Korean assignment.

Assistant Secretary of the Navy Koehler, addressing the Propeller Club of the Port of New York, in January, described the Hungnam evacuation, the operation in which the *Meredith Victory* achieved her almost unbelievable feat. He said that "in the face of greatest possible odds, despite the handicaps of terrain and worse weather, and regardless of enemy assaults, the Navy safely loaded aboard ship and evacuated 105,000 fighting men, 100,000 civilians, 17,500 vehicles and 350,000 measurement tons of material."

Quoting Vice Admiral Struble, who was present at the operation, he said that for the first time in history, "an entire army with all its supplies and equipment has been successfully deployed by sea in the face of emergency pressure." Then Mr. Koehler added, as his own words, the following very significant and very gallant expression of the sentiments of the Navy:

"While this is no time for self-adulation, to suppress a surge of pride at this accomplishment would be somewhat less than human. Nor should I fail to point out to you that it would obviously have been a physical impossibility to carry out this staggering task without the ships and crews of the American merchant marine who were a vital component of this operation.

"Not only at Hungnam, but at Pusan, Inchon, and other Korean ports these merchant vessels have played vital roles in every operation since hostilities began. Consequently, our traditional 'Well done' goes equally to the American merchant marine and to the Navy."

If additional figures are needed, here are a few. In a 4-month period following the outbreak of the Korean hostilities nearly 4,000,000 tons of cargo, exclusive of petroleum products, were moved from the continental United States to the Pacific theater in support of the United Nations forces. Of this, more than 80 percent moved in privately owned American flag ships. In addition, 185,000 military passengers were moved to the fighting front.

Any sound student of national defense or national economy will explain quickly enough that the merchant marine stands abreast the Army, Navy, and Air Force in the waging of war, an essential peacetime protection to our foreign trade in the fierce competition that exists for markets throughout the world. They will point out, too, that millions of dollars spent in labor and materials in the construction of a ship and then in operating her, are part of our national income. They would not be if the ship were built abroad and manned by foreign crews.

The distressing feature of all this is that the lesson seems never really to be absorbed. There must be other Hungnams, other *Meredith Victories*. And even then we will find ourselves facing that question: Why a merchant marine?